

MARITIME MUSEUM REVIEW
COMMITTEE REPORT:

Development of the Gallants Channel Property

September 2008

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

Lisbeth C. Evans, Secretary

The Committee and Its Charge

Late in 2006 Secretary of Cultural Resources Lisbeth C. Evans appointed a committee of twelve to study the future of the North Carolina Maritime Museum and prepare recommendations regarding the development of the Gallants Channel property. Of the twelve, seven are public members and five are staff members of the Department of Cultural Resources. Ms. Ellen Newbold of Rose Hill chairs the committee. The group met seven times: an organizational meeting in Greenville on July 25, 2007; in Morehead City on September 11, 2007; a public hearing on January 17, 2008, at the Duke University Marine Laboratory on Pivers Island; in Morehead City the following day; in Raleigh on March 12, 2008; and in Raleigh on June 26, 2008. A final meeting was held on September 18, 2008, in Raleigh.

The invitation to serve on the committee, relayed in a memorandum prepared by Dr. Jeffrey J. Crow, Deputy Secretary, outlined the group's task, that being "to evaluate the 36-acre Gallants Channel property in Beaufort, N.C., recently acquired by the state." He further noted that "the site holds great potential as a center of study for natural and historical resources" and that "the review committee will assess and evaluate the role the site will play within the community, Department of Cultural Resources, and the state." Dr. Crow asked the committee to seek public comment from citizens, Carteret County educators and leaders, and experts in such fields as maritime history, archaeology, biology, and history preservation.

The public hearing on Pivers Island was key to the committee's deliberations. Wide publicity preceded the hearing and 115 people attended the evening meeting with eighteen taking the microphone. Presentations were made by representatives of the

Queen Anne's Revenge (QAR) project and leaders of the Friends of the Maritime Museum, past and present. The committee was encouraged to be mindful of past work toward developing the Gallants Channel property. Beyond the chance to speak at the hearing, opportunity was made available for the public to comment online. After the meeting, the committee sought input from Maritime Museum staff members via a survey asking them to prioritize the proposed elements in any development plan.

At the first meeting at East Carolina University in Greenville, Secretary Evans set before the committee its charge. She noted that the property (Appendix A) had only recently been acquired by the state and that the group had a “clean slate” with respect to determining the future for the tract. She asked those present to “dream big.” She foresaw an opportunity to create on the property a major cultural institution, one with substantial economic impact for the region. Her goal, she said, was to maximize the tract’s use for all the citizens of North Carolina.

Deputy Secretary Crow took part in all of the committee’s meetings. Mr. Ken Howard, Director of State History Museums, took part in the fifth, sixth, and seventh meetings and had substantial input into the recommendations regarding capital improvements on the site. The group, nonetheless, operated by consensus and what follows represents the conclusions of the group as a whole.

Background

The North Carolina Maritime Museum traces its beginnings to 1951, when the General Assembly established a coastal marine museum in Beaufort, called the Hampton Marine Museum, within the Department of Agriculture. Displays were modest and

operation was seasonal. In 1975 the museum was reorganized, renamed the Hampton Mariners Museum, and opened on a full-time schedule with a small professional staff. A new statement of purpose broadened its scope to include maritime history as well as the coastal environment and marine life. In 1984 the institution took its present name and the following year moved into the present quarters on Front Street. The Harvey W. Smith Watercraft Center, across the street from the main building, is a major asset. In 1998 administration of the museum shifted from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Cultural Resources. Since intra-department reorganization in 2001, the museum has been part of the Division of State History Museums within the Office of Archives and History.

Presently the Maritime Museum has a staff of twenty with specialties in maritime archaeology, education, science, exhibit design, marine research, and boatbuilding. A corps of about 100 volunteers contribute their time and approximately 260,000 visitors made their way through the doors in fiscal year 2006-2007. The museum is accredited by the American Association of Museums and is a member of the Council of American Maritime Museums. The mission statement for the museum reads:

The North Carolina Maritime Museum documents, collects, preserves, and researches the maritime history—and its correlated natural history—of coastal North Carolina for the purpose of interpreting this history through its educational services and exhibits for our contemporary society and passing intact its material culture to future generations.

Integral to the development of the North Carolina Maritime Museum has been its support organization, the Friends of the Museum. That group, formed in 1979 as a nonprofit organization with 501 (c)(3) status, has grown to approximately 1,500 dues-paying members. Members have invested not only their dollars, but their time and

manpower to ensure that the Maritime Museum is a first-class operation. This has included the purchase of items needed by staff members and volunteers in the museum and watercraft center that could not be bought with state funds. This summer (2008) members have gathered regularly on the Gallants Channel property for cleanup and landscape work.

It was at the instigation of the Friends of the Museum that the Gallants Channel property was acquired for the pending expansion. Members recognized an opportunity when the former Beaufort Fish Meal Company property came on the market. The 36-acre tract had been home to the Beaufort Fish Meal Company and the Davis Seafood Company, processors of menhaden and a major employer in Carteret County in the mid-twentieth century. Harvey W. Smith (his wife was a major benefactor of the Maritime Museum and the watercraft center bears his name), operated the factory. Many older citizens in Beaufort worked for the factory or on one of its ships. By the 1970s production had ceased at the facility. The main building used by the Beaufort Fish Meal Company was judged to be unsalvageable and was demolished in 2005.

Commercial development for the tract loomed but the Friends saw the chance to acquire for the Museum deep water frontage offering potential for programming expansion not available on Front Street. The Department of Agriculture, then administratively responsible for the Maritime Museum, did not support state purchase. The Friends, with legislative support, in 1996 purchased the property, preserving the site for future development of the Maritime Museum. The Friends invested heavily in improvement of the bulkhead and remaining buildings and constructed docks on the site. Governor Michael F. Easley and the Council of State approved transfer from the Friends

to the state on October 3, 2006. The assignment for the Maritime Museum Review Committee was to devise the best possible plan for use of the Gallants Channel tract.

Previous Studies

The Friends of the Museum produced a series of reports on the Gallants Channel tract, all completed in the period 1997-99: (1) a Long-Range Plan for the Development of the North Carolina Maritime Museum—Gallants Channel Site, issued in July 1997 and revised in September 1999 (thirty-nine pages); (2) an Environmental Assessment of the tract prepared by Blue Land, Water, Infrastructure in 1999 (seventeen pages) and submitted to the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management; and (3), most notably, the North Carolina Maritime Museum Architectural Program for the Gallants Channel Site (ninety pages), prepared in November 1999 by OBrienAtkins of Research Triangle Park, and subsequent work done by CJMW of Winston-Salem, another architectural firm, to prepare a site plan (Appendix B) and model. That plan included an amphitheater, maritime village, conference center, restaurant, shops, hotel, and a windmill, a total of thirty-two buildings or features. Recent estimates placed the costs of such development at \$80-100 million.

The committee wishes to make clear its respect for the dedication shown by the Friends of the Museum to acquire the property and to complete the earlier studies and its intent to build upon rather than discard the earlier work. The present study will not attempt to incorporate the level of detail found in the previous reports but rather will point out areas of agreement and disagreement.

Site Development

The previous plans, while ambitious and creative, raised profound questions about construction costs, economic sustainability, environmental impact, and historical accuracy. The imperative for the present committee is to produce a plan for sustainable development, one instituted in stages and one likely to garner the necessary legislative and private support.

It is the consensus of the committee that development of the property (Appendix C) should include the construction of three major new buildings: (1) a new Maritime Museum, (2) an Exposition Center, and (3) an Education Center:

- **The new museum building of 50,000 square feet should have three principal galleries, those being, first, permanent space dedicated to the *Queen Anne's Revenge* and the "Golden Age of Piracy"; second, permanent space dedicated to fishing, boating, and maritime and natural history; and, third, rotating gallery space for temporary exhibits.** The scale for the building will be similar to that of the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City with appropriate modifications (Appendix D).

The *Queen Anne's Revenge* focus is a natural one for the Gallants Channel development. Since the discovery of what is believed to be the remains of Blackbeard's flagship in 1996, the Beaufort-Morehead City area (the wreck is just offshore) has been the focus of international attention. The recovery of artifacts from the wreck site continues with the expectation that, should funding be available, it will extend over the next several years. Conservation of the artifacts, presently taking place in Pitt County in space made available by East Carolina

University, will extend over a much longer period of time. The new Maritime Museum will offer an opportunity to display artifacts and to interpret the “Golden Age of Piracy” as well as hosting some aspects of the conservation work. Indeed, the *QAR* should be the new museum’s principal draw. It should be the hook to lure tourists from across the nation and around the world.

The committee further recommends that a full-scale replica of the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* be constructed and berthed at Gallants Channel. The Department of Cultural Resources presently operates the *Elizabeth II* on Roanoke Island and the committee does not discount the difficulty of constructing and operating such a vessel. Counterbalancing that, however, is the positive gain to be realized from such an attraction which bids to be a new North Carolina icon. The construction process itself should stir considerable public interest.

- **The second major building at Gallant’s Channel will be an Exposition Center of approximately 30,000 square feet, projected to be built and operated in conjunction with Carteret County.** The project will require a memorandum of agreement, or more likely several, to cover details of the construction and operation. The Exposition Center must have its own dedicated source of funding. Use of the property for boat shows, trade fairs, and the like will create its own revenue stream. The construction of the Exposition Center will meet the presently unmet local need for community space. Placement directly alongside the new museum should create a sense of synergy and shared objectives.
- **The third building, one likely to be constructed as part of a later phase of development, will be an Education Center.** The structure will extend the vital

mission of the museum to educate visitors, young and old, about coastal heritage.

In addition to offering classroom space, the structure will include dormitory facilities for students and others involved in programming at the museum. (Such provision, that is, educational use, does not violate the Umstead Act which prohibits governmental entities from competing with private business.)

Construction of a hotel or conference center, envisioned in earlier plans, might well have run afoul of the Umstead Act. In addition, the Fish Meal building should be reconstructed and used principally for storage.

It is the consensus of the committee that the “Olde Beaufort Seaport” concept put forward as part of earlier plans, should not be adopted. That plan, based explicitly on the Mystic (Connecticut) Seaport model, called for the recreation of a period maritime village. Historical interpretations in recent years increasingly have moved away from such recreations. Those institutions which use this model such as Williamsburg, Mystic, and Old Salem have witnessed declines in attendance and financial problems. Rather, the committee recommends that recreations, where desired, be made part of interior exhibits within the new museum building.

The exception here is the Custom House (Ward Hancock House), which is scheduled to be moved to the waterfront at Gallants Channel. The Department of Cultural Resources long ago made a commitment to the Beaufort Woman’s Club to see that building so positioned. The ca. 1726 structure is one of singular importance to the history of Beaufort. The town was one of five official ports of call in the colony and the home belonging to the customs collector is of significance to maritime history. The

house is the oldest surviving gambrel roof house in the state. It is a reminder of a much earlier era and offers several possibilities for adaptive reuse at the site.

Bridge Plans and Impact

In 2000 the North Carolina Department of Transportation selected a route for the new US 70 bridge leading into Beaufort. The new span will replace the present Grayden Paul Bridge. That route (Appendix E) will take traffic north of the present bridge and will situate the massive high-traffic bridge, work on which is scheduled to begin in 2015, directly in front of the Gallants Channel property. The old bridge is scheduled to be removed. **The consequence of the new bridge for development of the Gallants Channel property will be substantial.** The view toward the south, blocked by the massive bridge, will be obliterated. Orientation of new structures at Gallants Channel will be guided accordingly.

The committee suggests that the new museum building be oriented without direct views of the bridge and to maximize energy savings. That museum building, which will include porches and some outdoor programming, should be the middle structure among the three planned for the site (Appendix F). The Exposition Center should be situated the closest to the footprint of the bridge as most of its use will be indoors.

In addition to sight lines, the new bridge will impinge upon development with traffic noise. Consequently, no amphitheater is suggested. Rather, an indoor auditorium should be part of the museum or the Education Center. In the area where the bridge cuts across the Gallants Channel tract, the present site of the Junior Sailing program, care should be taken to create sound barriers.

Conclusion

Upon completion, the new facilities at Gallants Channel will become the main location for the North Carolina Maritime Museum. The existing museum building on Front Street should be transformed into an auxiliary facility, with an emphasis on education and administrative uses, with a boat taxi to connect the two. The watercraft center on Front Street will retain its present focus. **Every effort should be made to retain and enhance popular existing water-related programs.** Presently, the museum interprets natural history as well as maritime history, a science coordinator is on the staff, and natural history is part of the mission statement. The opportunity exists at Gallants Channel to construct a walking trail and interpretive signage about the tract.

A guiding principle for the site, a particular goal of the current staff, is “green” development. Insofar as possible, materials and construction techniques selected should be environmentally sound. All effort should be made to highlight the conservation of energy and to recommend and support “green” practices whenever possible. The site should have “green” buildings that use, demonstrate, teach, and promote the use of renewable energy and regional materials. Of course, all state regulations regarding permeability of surfaces and mitigation of other environmental impacts must be followed.

The broader concept of sustainability should be another guiding principle. This extends to the long-range operation of the new facility. For the museum, two possible revenue sources are anticipated, those being an admission charge and monies generated by the rental of space. Moreover, staged development will be required as funds will not be available to construct all new buildings at one time. Priority should go toward site

preparation and the design of the new museum with the Exposition Center and Education Center to follow in due course.

Legislative support and private fundraising are key to the development of the Gallants Channel property. Indeed, the Friends of the Museum long have had a fundraising campaign underway for the project. The intent of this committee is that this report provide an impetus to the development and that leadership in place at the North Carolina Maritime Museum move the effort forward. The goal is to create a major cultural asset, one which will be an economic boon to the county, state, and region. The promise offered by this prime piece of real estate will be fulfilled



Legend:

- 01 Welcome Center
- 02 Administrative Offices
- 03 Windmill
- 04 Museum of Boating and Fishing
- 05 Education Center
- 06 Shipwreck Hall
- 07 Marine Railway & Foundry
- 08 Town Green / Commons
- 09 Amphitheater
- 10 Ward Hancock House
- 11 Boardwalk and Maritime Village
- 12 Small Ship Berth
- 13 Dry Dock Boats
- 14 Rookery & Bog Marsh Exhibits
- 15 Wetlands
- 16 Painted Bunting Preserve
- 17 Junior Sailing Area and Rowing Center
- 18 Laydown / Work Area
- 19 Maintenance
- 20 Public Parking
- 21 Drop-Off / Pick-Up
- 22 Water Taxi
- 23 Great Lawn
- 24 Conference Center
- 25 Banquet Room
- 26 Restaurant
- 27 Outdoor Space and Garden
- 28 Shoppes / Guest Houses / City Scape
- 29 Future Shoppes / Guest Houses / City Scape
- 30 Guest Rooms
- 31 Future Guest Rooms
- 32 Administration Building (Sears House)



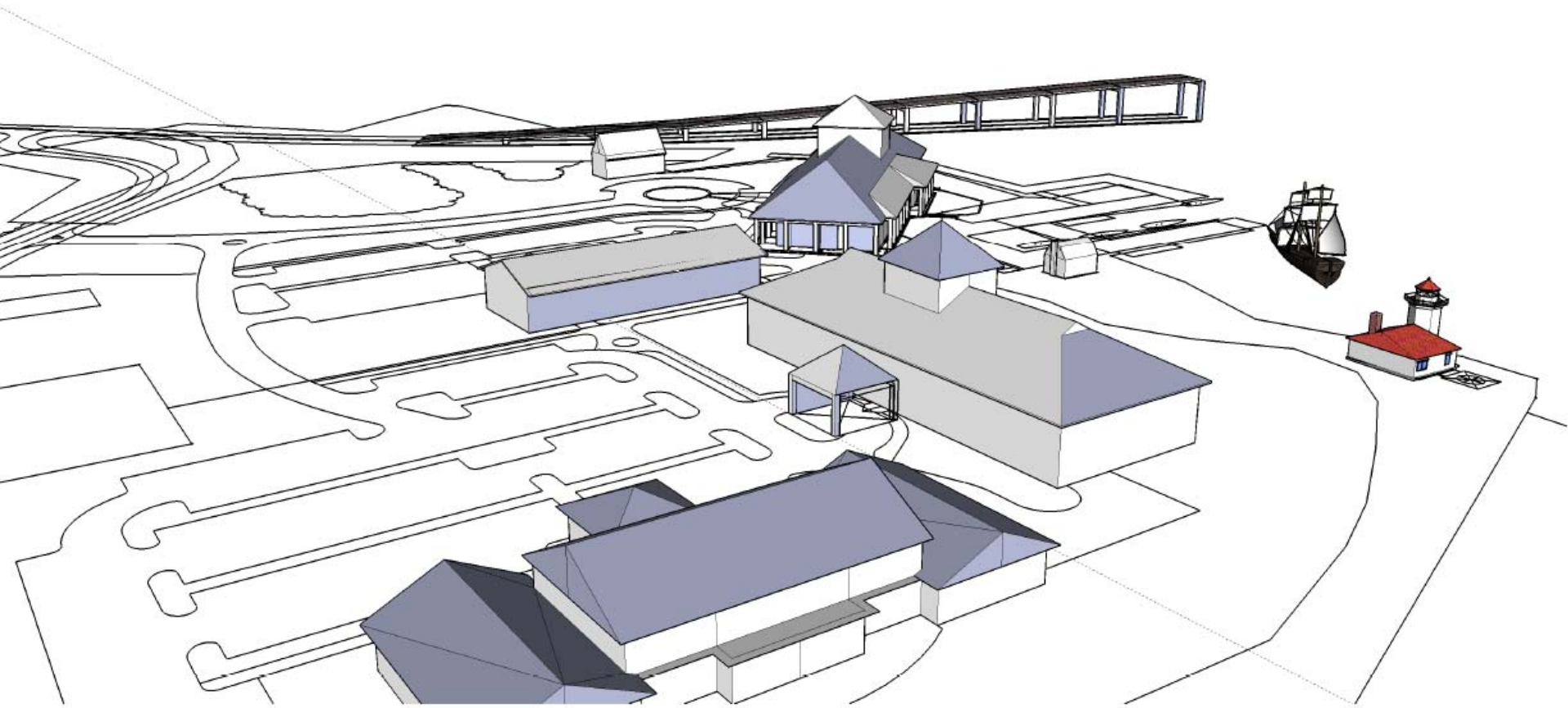


2008 Plan Prepared by Steve Miller, DCR Capital Projects



Museum of the Albemarle, Elizabeth City

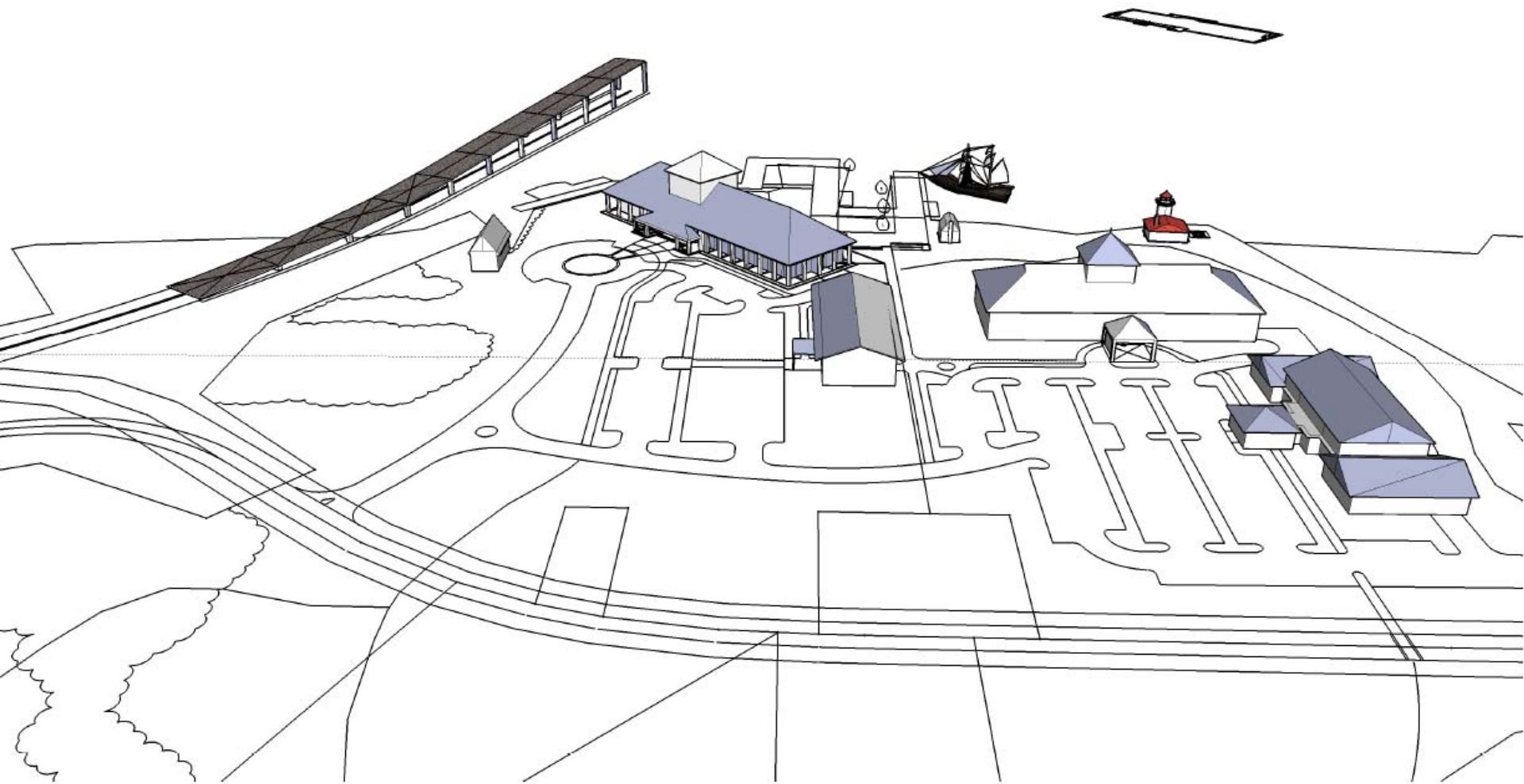




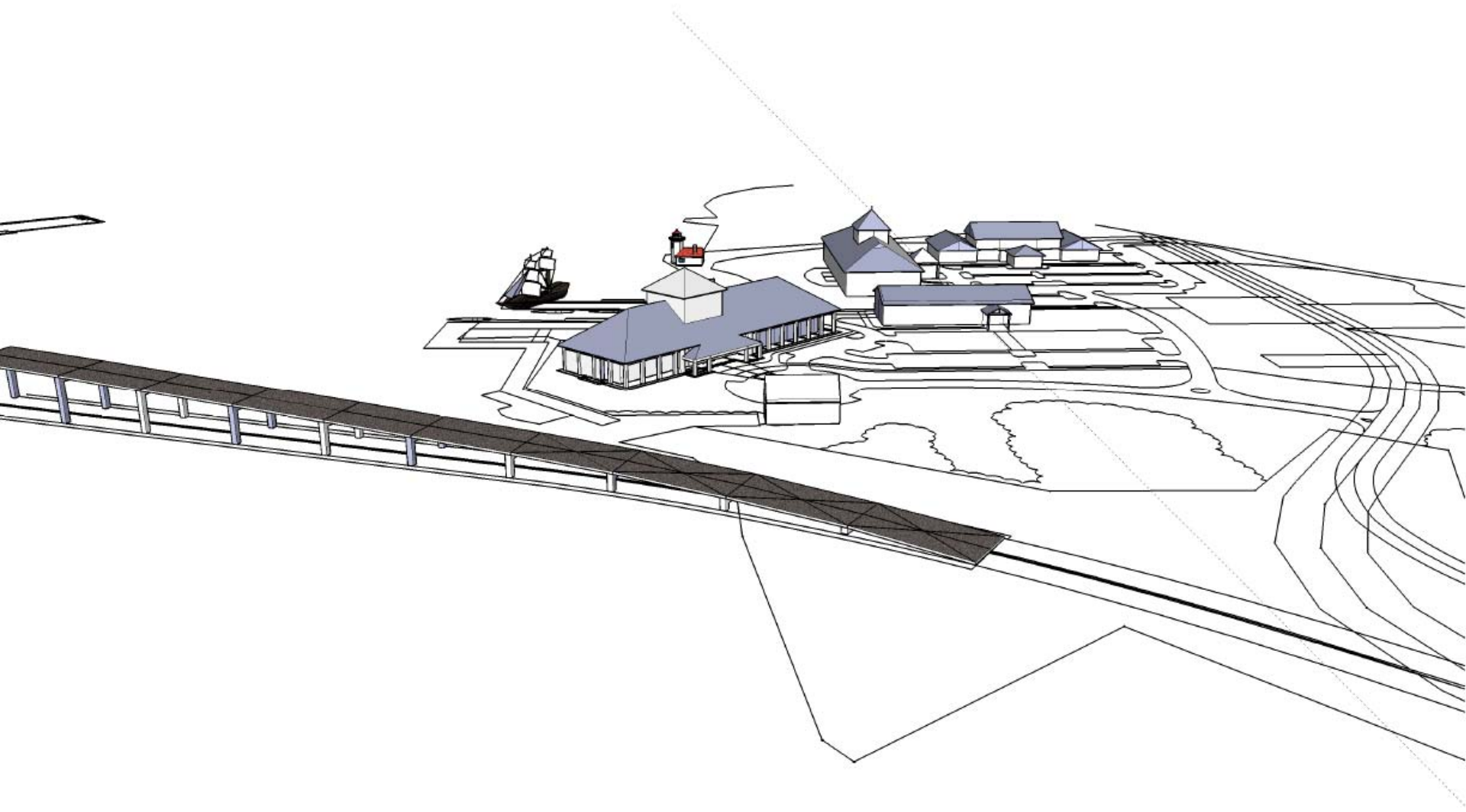
1. Birds Eye View Facing Bridge



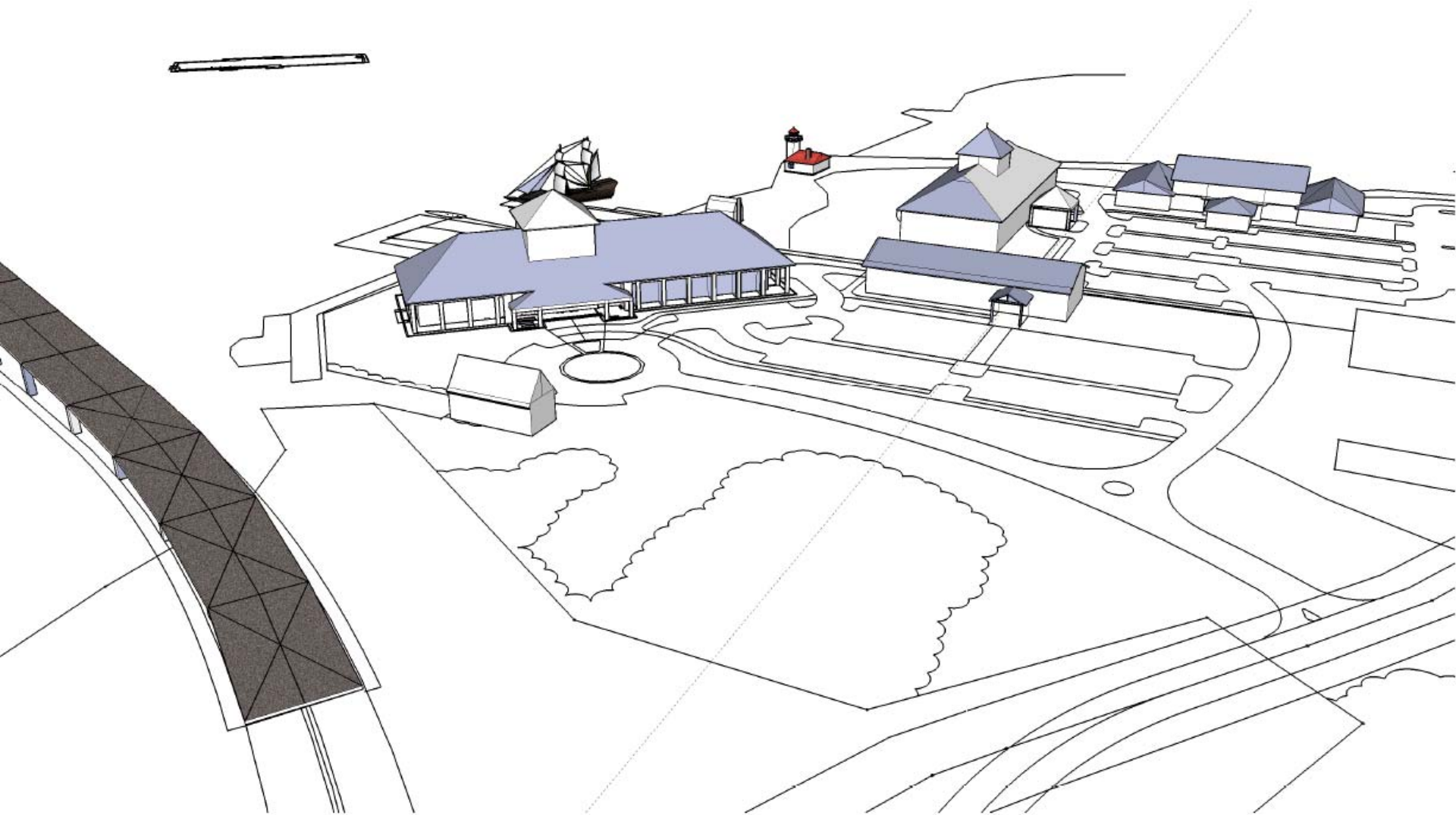
2. Aerial West



3. West Bridge on South Side



4. North View



5. Birds Eye from Highway

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